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UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

General Peter Pace

Media Round-table discussion

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Valerie Adamcyk: I'd just like to thank you all for coming to the Office of Public Affairs to speak with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace. I'm not going to spend a lot of time introducing the General right now because I know you know who he is, however, I would like to give a few words to get started and then he'll take your questions. The General will be able to speak to us for about twenty minutes today. So I will be calling the last question.

General Pace: Well, first of all, thank you. I really do appreciate your time today and through you the opportunity to speak to the Australian people. I came here, really for two very specific reasons. One was hopefully, by my presence – and as you all know the time distance factors to get here – to say thank you to everyone here in Australia for what has been decades of friendship between our two countries and to pay my respects to your military, who it is our great privilege to serve side by side with in Iraq and Afghanistan. But also to make note of the fact that in this region your country and your armed forces reach out to many of the island nations in an effort to assist them in being stable and providing for their citizens. So there are many ways that your armed forces are leading in the world and we very much appreciate that leadership. Second, I wanted to meet with my good friend, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston to just have discussions about how we might be able to cooperate better in the future – exercises and the like that might be to the benefit of both Australia and the United States. It's great to be here with the US ambassador. When I'm here in Australia, I'm part of his team and I'm proud to be part of his team.

Questions please.

Cynthia Banham: Do you think, General, that Australia has made any difference to the war in Iraq. We've heard some comments today that suggest maybe Australia's contribution is so small as to be insignificant. What contribution ... what effect, if any, do you think Australia's presence has had on the US's ability to operate in Iraq?

- General Pace: I think that Australia has made enormous contribution and I wouldn't put it in terms of the US ability to operate. I would put it in terms of the Iraqi citizens' ability to have a productive life. If you look at the two provinces where your forces have operated, they are two of the provinces that have already been turned over to complete Iraqi lead. That's significant. It tells you that when you don't look at, when you focus in on, Diyala and Baghdad and Al'Anbar – which is where all the problems are – that you can see things that need to be fixed. But if you look around the rest of the nation, where your forces have been, that things are relatively stable, that the Iraqi government and Iraqi armed forces are able to take the lead. That could not have happened without your forces being there and still being there in what we would call over-watch to be able to help if needed. I think Australia should take great pride in the contributions that you've made. And to those who say that small numbers are small numbers and big numbers are big numbers, I would respectfully disagree. The fight we're in against terrorism is not about large armies versus large armies. It's about small groups of individuals, five, ten, fifteen, twenty, very well trained, if they're military, very well trained if they're civilian, who are reaching out to assist those who are in need. In that regard, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, Australia should be able to take great pride.
- Lynn Bell: Do you think it's a little bit a matter of geography? That it's relatively stable where Australia is – against other provinces?
- General Pace: No, not about geography at all. It has very much to do with the people there who want to have stability and forces like Australia who are able to provide it. As an example, in Baghdad right now, not enough people want to have stability and therefore, no matter how many troops you put in, until they want to have stability and until their government is able to provide the kind of political leadership that they are now providing, you have problems. But in areas where Australian forces have been, where the people have wanted to have stability, the Australian forces have been able to help them get that.
- Dennis Shanahan: How important is the psychological element of having other forces with American forces in Iraq? How important is the Australian role in the wider sense of the alliance and the Coalition of the Willing?
- General Pace: I think it's enormously important that as many nations as possible participate in whatever way they're able to help in Iraq, to help in Afghanistan, to help in the war on terrorism because if you read what the al-Qaeda has published about their goal, their goal really is to subjugate all free countries. That means that all of us who are fortunate to live in free countries have a responsibility to protect our freedoms and that of our grandchildren. The more countries who recognize that, the more countries that participate, the more I think that the citizens of the countries we're trying to help understand that this is not about the United States, not about Australia, but about freedom-loving countries everywhere reaching out to them. I would point to some of the countries like Poland and Hungary and other nations that have recently won their freedom. Those nations that know what it's like to not have freedom are amongst these strongest advocates of helping others. So again, it's not in how many people a particular nation sends, it's about nations – as many as possible – doing what they can, inside their own sovereignty, to reach out and help others.
- Brendan Nicholson: General, we've had a couple of fairly bleak reports out recently on prospects in Iraq. Are you confident that the war there can be won?
- General Pace: I am confident that collectively we can help provide in Iraq enough security that the government of Iraq can function properly and so that citizens in Iraq can live

their lives the way they want to. Victory in this war on terror is not like victory in other wars. If I could use Washington, DC as an example. There's crime in Washington, DC, but the police force keeps the crime below the level at which the government can function and the citizens in Washington, DC can go about living their lives the way they want to. That's what victory in the war on terrorism is like. Not that you will do away with all terrorism, but that the number of terrorist acts will be below a level at which, in Iraq for example, the Iraqi government can function and the Iraqi people can live their lives the way that they want to.

But it's going to take three parts to move forward together. One is certainly security. Two is the political leadership under Prime Minister al'Maliki and he has demonstrated as he has promised, his very balanced approach to the leadership that he's providing in the Baghdad security planning. And three, is economic development and jobs. The government of Iraq has promised that they will spend ten billion of their own – in US dollar equivalents – ten billion, to help provide jobs for the citizens of Baghdad and al'Anbar. With those three things moving together, there's every reason to be hopeful that we can collectively help provide what you would describe as a win.

Brendan Nicholson: And what would happen if the Coalition troops pulled out, pulled out within a year or early next year as has been suggested?

General Pace: I think that if Coalition troops pull out prematurely, that we will then have a humanitarian disaster because you will have sectarian violence that will get out of hand. You will have then many more Iraqis who are killed. And you will then have, I believe, a spill-over effect into Afghanistan. So, I don't see precise timelines as being useful. It should not be an open-ended commitment. Certainly, it's time for the Iraqis as they are to take on more of their own responsibility, but a premature withdrawal of the international support that's being provided would do great damage to the Iraqi people.

Lynn Bell: So what do define then, as premature? What do you see as that time-scale without putting a time-scale on it?

General Pace: I think what we need to do is look at the benchmarks. Look at the security in Baghdad. When the Coalition along with the Iraqi armed forces are able to clear neighborhoods, with Iraqis in the lead, have Iraqi army and police remain and hold those areas, and have the Iraqi government with the help of the international governments increase the quality of life, that will then allow us – all of us – to begin withdrawing our troops. But to put a precise timeline on it means that you're signaling to your potential enemies that if they just hold their breath for this amount of time, then we'll all be gone and they can come back out of the woodwork. That's not what this is about. This is about helping the Iraqi people establish – and their government – establish a governmental presence and an economic presence that becomes self-sustaining. And to put a specific timeline on that – I couldn't do it if I wanted to. I just know that there are the things that need to get done before we can in good comfort start leaving.

Jim Garamone: Sir, it's been more than a month since President Bush announced the new strategy and a lot of it hinges on the Iraqis doing things. Are the Iraqis doing things they promised and if they are, is it making a difference in Baghdad?

General Pace: Yeah. So far, everything that the Iraqi government has promised that they would do, they have done. Examples: They said that they would have three brigades of their army, plus the current number that they have in Baghdad. The first of those

brigades is already there. The second and third are on the way. The Prime Minister promised that he would select a commander and sub-commanders for Baghdad that were good leaders and that were balanced in their approach to all sects. Lieutenant General Abud who is now the Iraqi commander in Baghdad is proving to be a very good leader and has a very balanced approach to mixed neighborhoods, Sunni neighborhoods and Shia neighborhoods. The promise that the Prime Minister made of leading in a way that would encourage all sects in Iraq to be comfortable is proving true. He has been out speaking about the need to take action against criminals regardless of sect and he has had those speeches in front of his Parliament and his Parliament has voted in approval of his plan. To date, everything that is supposed to have been delivered by the Iraqi government has been and as long as we continue on this path and continue to help them, we should be optimistic about the opportunity in Baghdad to lessen the violence.

- Al Pessin: Are you seeing a difference (indistinct) Moqtada al'Sadr?
- General Pace: A couple of things that would lead you to believe that things are different. One would be, about three weeks ago I think it was, there was a Iraqi army operation in a Sunni neighborhood that took on Sunni terrorists and involved Coalition support. It was very successful. There was about a week ago, an Iraqi army, Iraqi police operation that was eventually backed up by the Iraqi army that was then backed up by Coalition forces that was a Shia terrorist organization – relatively large – three to four hundred – who were about to take action. So the Iraqi armed forces have shown a balanced approach and have shown that they can be effective when they're in combat. We should continue to support them
- Graeme Dobell: General you spoke at the beginning about the Australian role in the southwest Pacific, what Australia refers to as the Arc of Instability, which is taking a lot of Australian attention. Do you see some tensions for Australia between the sorts of tasks Australia is seeing for itself in its own neighbourhood and the language the U.S. is increasingly using, say in the National Security Strategy, about the alliance with Australia being a global strategy. How well do you think Australia can play that regional role but also step up.
- General Pace: Well, out of my lane to make judgments about your country and your government. You're a sovereign nation, and you're going to make the decisions that best solve, serve your purposes. But, just looking at recent history, clearly Australia has been able to operate in Iraq, has been able to operate in Afghanistan at the same time, and at the same time provide peacekeeping forces in East Timor, to try to help solve some of the problems in other island nations, so I think that Australia has clearly demonstrated the ability to lead globally, but also to have very specific lead in area events, so you've already shown that that's doable.
- Dennis Shanahan: General, you mentioned earlier that a premature withdrawal could have some flow-over effect into Afghanistan. What sort of effect would you see, and would you see a wider effect on the war on terror globally?
- General Pace: It's hard to prove something that has not happened, but I think it's arguable that right now Iraq is the center of gravity in the war on terror, and that Baghdad is the center of gravity inside that battle. But that if the terrorists were successful in Iraq, they would be emboldened then to use the same tactics in Afghanistan. Inarguably, if they are not engaged in Iraq, they are available to go to Afghanistan. So I think you would see, based on what they have said on their own published plan that they intend to establish a caliphate, first in Iraq and then spread it through Afghanistan and other parts of this region. Sorry—the last part of your question?

- Dennis Shanahan: And what effect on the wider, global war on terror beyond Afghanistan?
- General Pace: It would certainly encourage those who seek to do us all harm in their goals. So there is no alternative for free nations, other than to prevail.
- Al Pessin: General...
- General Pace: This is not the fight we thought we were going to have in Iraq, but it is the fight we have right now. And we can either prevail in Iraq, or end up having to fight a very similar event in Afghanistan, or have these terrorists follow us home here to Australia and back to the United States and elsewhere. The enemy has a hundred-year plan, and we need to understand that and we need to determine how best to fight that, and right now that fight is in Iraq.
- Al Pessin : General, a U.S. military briefing in Iraq yesterday presented what they said was evidence of Iranian government involvement in sending the EFTs, can't remember what it stands for but you know what they are, into Iraq. I have two questions. The briefers refused to be identified publicly, and so my first question is are you confident that this information that has been presented anonymously is accurate, and secondly, if it is accurate, how can the United States take the kind of hands-off attitude towards Iran that I think you've spoken about this week?
- General Pace: I'm not too much interested in making comment on anonymous comments, because I don't know who they are...
- Al Pessin: This is a briefing for dozens of reporters, it's in all the papers.
- General Pace: And it's an anonymous briefing?
- Al Pessin: It was a briefing by several military officials and intelligence analysts, but they told the reporters they couldn't say who they were, in the reporting. This is the long-awaited briefing on presenting the evidence, and they lined up shells and tubes and ...
- General Pace: Well, let me just tell you what I know, rather than try to guess what someone else is saying anonymously. What I know is that we are going to continue very vigorously to attack the IED networks – the Improvised Explosive Device networks – and inside of those networks are the Explosively Formed Projectiles, which are very very powerful munitions. It's instructive that as we have gone after those networks without regard to nationality of those who are perpetrating the networks, that twice we have found Iranians. And that we know that the Explosively Formed Projectiles are manufactured in Iran. What I would not say is that the Iranian government per se knows about this. It is clear that Iranians are involved. And it is clear that materials from Iran are involved. But I would not say based on what I know that the Iranian government clearly knows or is complicit. But they do know that in our attacks against those who are attacking us inside of Iraq that we have found Iranians, and that should be instructive to the Iranian government also.
- Valerie Adamcyk: We only have time for a final question.
- Graeme Dobell: Sure. General, on this swing through Asia, and this press conference is a pretty good example, how do you answer concerns that you might be hearing in Asia that the U.S. is so focused on this hundred-year war that you're talking about, that other issues in Asia, and say, one of the issues that the U.S. itself has pointed to,

the rise and rise of China, the U.S. has identified China as the one emerging power that could challenge the U.S. militarily. How do you answer the concerns in Asia that the U.S. is so focused on the Middle East that some of its traditional roles in Asia are falling by the way?

General Pace:

I'll stay inside my own lane, which is the military lane, and I can tell you that not only do we focus on the current battle, which is in Iraq and Afghanistan, but that we are also looking after the future against potential peer competitors, and against potential asymmetric threats. We are well positioned to defend our interests. We do have a significant amount of our armed forces currently involved in the war on terror. But if you look at just the U.S. armed forces, we have 2.4 million American service men and women, active guard and reserve, about 200,000 of them are currently serving in the Gulf region, another 200,000 are serving elsewhere in the world, which leaves about 2 million active guard and reserve who are in the United States, capable of responding. So we have sufficient capacity to take care of today's problems and be properly positioned militarily to take care of tomorrow's problems. That's in my lane, and I can be very comfortable in telling you that we are ready to handle any challenges that we can foresee in the future.

Valerie Adamcyk:

Thank you so much, General, for being here,

General Pace:

Thank you all for your time. I appreciate it.

MEDIA ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION ENDS